

# New information on birds in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

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Despite its exceptional prominence as a conservation area (IUCN 1985), Serengeti National Park (SNP) lacks a formal survey of its birds; yet the Park's importance to wildlife increases with the growing human pressures on wildland outside its boundaries. The most comprehensive description of the avifauna of SNP is presented in Schmidl's (1982) check-list. In this paper I present new information on the status of some birds in SNP, including 18 species not previously recorded there. Observations were made opportunistically while I was carrying out other work between March 1985 and December 1987. As Schmidl (1982) pointed out, fuller knowledge of SNP's birds requires that such casual observations are published and the opportunity is taken here also to discuss the significance of the records.

In the following annotated list an asterisk (\*) indicates that the species was not included in Schmidl's (1982) check-list. The Serengeti Wildlife Research Centre is given the abbreviation SWRC. Names of localities follow Caro's (1970) map of Serengeti National Park and the surrounding area. All references to Schmidl are to his 1982 check-list.

## \*BANDED SNAKE EAGLE *Circaetus cinerascens*

One seen over riverine forest on Mbalageti R. near Handajega, 23 June 1986. Britton (1980) gives its range in Tanzania as much further both east (Arusha) and west (Kibondo), but notes its presence along the Mara R. in Kenya.

## \*LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE *Aquila pomarina*

One seen near Sansambe R, 17 Jan 1987; 2 over Nyaraswiga, 19 Dec 1986; one 5 km N of Lobo, 21 Jan 1987; one over Nyaraswiga, 6 Mar 1987; one at a rain puddle between Nyaraswiga and Banagi, 8 Nov 1987; and one 10 km S of Lobo, 15 Nov 1987. The January records support Britton's (1980) suggestion that small numbers winter in northern Tanzania.

## AFRICAN HAWK EAGLE *Hieraetus spilogaster*

Schmidl records only immatures. Between 1985 and 1987 there were 7 observations of adults, including one of a pair.

## LIZARD BUZZARD *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*

Schmidl describes it as a rare visitor, but it was found to be common in *Combretum*/*Terminalia* in the NW, Jul 1985. This habitat was noted by Brown *et al.* (1982) as preferred. It was also found to be common in *Acacia*/*Commiphora* woodland and bushland between Musabi and Kirawira on 7 Nov 1985 after several days of heavy rain.

**CROWNED EAGLE** *Stephanoaetus coronatus*

A pair in relict *Acacia xanthophloea* woodland along a korongo 3 km S of Alamana R. on the eastern boundary of the Park, 4 May 1985 and one in young woodland and open grassland in Sonzo near Nyamalumbwa Hills, 15 Sep 1985. Schmidl lists only 3 old records from the Mara R.

**\*AFRICAN HOBBY** *Falco cuvieri*

One NE of SWRC, 28 Oct 1986.

**HOBBY** *Falco subbuteo*

Much more numerous during Oct–Nov 1986 than in those months in 1985 and 1987. During 1986 it was associated with heavy rain storms, and was attracted by emerging termites; for example 22 were seen between Mbuzi Mawe and Banagi, 22 Oct 1986. Schmidl considered it rare, giving only 2 dated records.

**RED-NECKED SPURFOWL** *Francolinus afer*

The range is more extensive than stated by Schmidl. Locally common in *Combretum*/*Terminalia* woodlands in NW, especially in area of dense *Combretum* regeneration and in thickets on large termitaria. Also common in tall grassland with *Acacia gerrardii* and *A. seyal* near Kenyangaga; along the Grumeti R. near Klein's Camp; and along drainage lines between Klein's Camp and Sand R. Breeding has not been recorded previously in SNP, but an adult with 2 half-grown young was found at Tabora B, 15 Sep 1985. Egg-laying would have been in Aug, which is slightly later than the dates given by Brown & Britton (1980) for this region.

**\*LESSER MOORHEN** *Gallinula angulata*

One on a flooded stream between Lobo and Klein's Camp, 20 Jan 1987.

**BROWN-CHESTED WATTLED PLOVER** *Vanellus superciliosus*

One on greenflush on heavily grazed short grassland at N end of Dutwa Plains, 10 Nov 1985. Schmidl notes only one specimen record, and no dated records, but quotes Britton (1980) that it might be regular.

**\*WHIMBREL** *Numenius phaeopus*

A flock of 10 at L. Lagarja, 19 Sep 1985. Britton (1980) notes that it is uncommon in E Africa away from the coast.

**\*GREAT SNIPE** *Gallinago media*

One at a rain pool on Dutwa Plains, 10 Nov 1985; one on 16 Dec 1986 and 4 on 17 Dec 1986 at rain pools on Tagoro, but none was seen at these last pools subsequently, so the birds may have been on passage.

**BLACK-FACED SANDGROUSE** *Pterocles decoratus*

Range more extensive than suggested by Schmidl, who states that it is confined to the western parts of the Park. However, it is common in woodland N to Tagoro, and less common N to Lobo and Grumeti R. One incubating eggs near SWRC, 20 Nov 1987, is the first breeding record for SNP. The date is outside the breeding season recorded by Brown & Britton (1980) for the region.

**\*CARMINE BEE-EATER** *Merops nubicus*

One in *Acacia gerrardii*/*A. senegal* woodland just S of the limits of cultivation between Fort Ikoma and Mugumu, 20 km W of the Park boundary, 13 Nov 1986. The bird was not seen clearly enough to identify the race.

**BLACK ROUGHWING SWALLOW** *Psalidoprocne pristopectera*

More common than suggested by Schmidl, who notes only one record. Seen around riverine forest and woodland at Sansambe R.—Wassi R. confluence, Mamarehe R., Grumeti R. at Baracharo Falls, Bologonja Spring and Tabora B Ranger Post.

**ANTEATER CHAT** *Myrmecocichla aethiops*

Apparently resident on the footslopes of Magogwa and Kuka Hills. Also seen 6 km N of Lobo, 8 Nov 1987. Schmidl describes it as a rare visitor.

**\*GREY WREN-WARBLER** *Camaroptera simplex*

One in termitarium thicket near Sangare R, 11 May 1985; a pair with recent fledglings in ridgetop *Combretum*/*Terminalia* woodland near Mbali Pali R, 6 Jul 1986; a pair in woodland near the top of Kamuyo Hill, 23 Dec 1986. The addition of this species to the SNP list is not unexpected, since Britton (1980) notes its presence at Loliondo and in the Mara R./Loita Hills region of Kenya.

**\*TABORA CISTICOLA** *Cisticola fulvicapilla*

Quite common in woodland and semi-evergreen thicket on Lobo, Magogwa, Longossa and Kuka Hills and in *Combretum*/*Terminalia* woodland, *Combretum*/*Ozaroa* bushed and wooded grassland and termitarium thickets in the NW. Also seen on Ngelek Hill, Lobo, in *Croton*/*Cordia*/*Grewia* thickets; on Varichoro Hills in *Combretum*/*Lonchocarpus*/*Grewia* wooded grassland and woodland; in *Acacia robusta* woodland on Losiurai; in *A. gerrardii* wooded grassland 5 km N of Lobo; and in *A. robusta* woodland on pediments of Oldoinyo Rongai. It is of interest that the records from Magogwa, Kuka and Lobo Hills are from over 2000 m, though Britton (1980) indicates that it occurs only below 1400 m.

**\*SINGING CISTICOLA** *Cisticola cantans*

Two seen in drainage line vegetation 7 km N of Lobo, 18 Jan 1987. Several cisticolas in rank herbage along Seronera R. above Kerr's Dam were either this species or Red-faced Cisticola *Cisticola erythrops*, which is also absent from Schmidl's list.

**\*STOUT CISTICOLA** *Cisticola robusta*

Scattered records, but appears to be widespread and locally common. Several in song in *Acacia gerrardii* woodland and bushland between Lobo and Klein's Camp, 11 Mar 1986 and 10 June 1987; in song on rocky hills near Seronera Wildlife Lodge Borehole, 25 Mar 1986; several in long grass along Wandamu R, 21 Dec 1986; common and in song in tall dense stands of the grasses *Pennisetum stramineum*, *Setaria* sp. and *Panicum maximum* on the margins of Hembe L, 6 Mar 1987; several in long grassland along Loiyangelani R, 29 Mar 1987.

**\*GREEN-CAPPED EREMOMELA** *Eremomela scotops*

Pairs in song in *Combretum/Terminalia* woodland and wooded grassland near Mbali Pali R, 18 Aug 1985 and 5 Jul 1986. Britton (1980) notes its presence in the nearby Masai Mara Reserve in Kenya.

**\*ICTERINE WARBLER** *Hippolais icterina*

One in a burnt *Acacia robusta* thicket in woodland on Kamuyo Hill, 23 Dec 1986 and one in song at the edge of the forest at Bologonja Spring, 8 Jan 1987. These records and the observation by J. Fanshawe of one at SWRC in Jan 1987 (East African Bird Report 1987; *Scopus*, 11) suggest that small numbers winter in SNP.

**FAN-TAILED WARBLER** *Schoenicola platyura*

Quite common in suitable habitat in the *Combretum/Terminalia* woodland zone of the NW; in rank herbage along riverine forest edges; in long grass around springs and seepages in woodland; and in reeds and thickets around pools in drainage lines. Schmidl notes only 2 records, both also in the NW. These records represent an extension of the range described by Britton (1980) for NE Tanzania, being further W than Fuggles-Couchman's (1981) records from the Crater Highlands. However, Britton (1980) notes its presence on the Mara R. in Kenya.

**\*MOUSTACHED WARBLER** *Sphenoeacus mentalis*

One in rank herbage and thickets in a drainage line at Tabora B Ranger Post, 20 Aug 1985. This appears to be an extension of the range, being mid-way between the apparently disjunct eastern and western distributions of the nominate race as described by Britton (1980).

**\*BARRED WARBLER** *Sylvia nisoria*

One in kopje vegetation at SWRC, 22 Dec 1986. This is further W in Tanzania than previous records (Britton 1980).

**LITTLE TAWNY PIPIT** *Anthus caffer*

More common than suggested by Schmidl, particularly in its apparent favoured habitat of bushland and bushed grassland with bushes of 1-4 m, especially where heavy grazing by wildebeest has reduced the grass between bushes. Occurs also in wooded grassland. *Acacia* regeneration of the type favoured by this species has replaced mature woodland over large areas in the past 20 years or so (Norton-Griffiths 1979). Song flights were observed over *Acacia gerrardii* regeneration N of Lobo, 23 Sep 1987, and over *A. drepanolobium* and *A. senegal* bushland on the plateau of Losiurui, 29 Oct 1987.

**GREY-CRESTED HELMET SHRIKE** *Prionops poliophya*

Schmidl indicates that this species is restricted to northern SNP. However, several flocks were seen in mature *Acacia robusta* woodland with dense regeneration thickets near the SNP/Maswa Game Reserve (MGR) boundary along the Duma R, 12 and 18 Oct 1985. A flock also was seen in *A. robusta* woodland with *Grewia* thickets on the lower slopes of Varichoro Hills, 22 Nov 1986. Lewis (1981) suggested that the lack of records in the area south of northern SNP might be due to few observers, or to confusion with the similar helmet shrike *Prionops plumata*. However, man-induced habitat changes have made the area just W of SNP and MGR

unsuitable for the species because agricultural activities have removed most of the indigenous woodland.

**GOLDEN-WINGED SUNBIRD** *Nectarinia reichenowi*

Only recorded from just outside SNP (Schmidl: 105). One seen in drainage line vegetation at Seronera, 17 Apr 1986 and one by Seronera R. at the eastern end of Nyaraswiga, 22 Mar 1987. These birds may originate from either the Crater (Britton 1980) or the Loliondo Highlands (Fuggles-Couchman 1981).

**\*BRONZE SUNBIRD** *Nectarinia kilimensis*

Several in large flowering trees at Klein's Camp, 2 Nov 1986.

**\*JACKSON'S WIDOWBIRD** *Euplectes jacksoni*

Common in grasslands N of Grumeti R. and between Klein's Camp and Lobo during the wet and early dry seasons. Display grounds in use were found near Klein's Camp, 5 May 1985 and at Bologonja Gate, 2 Jan 1987. Notably commoner in the 1986-87 wet season, when rainfall was greater than average, than in the preceding 2 wet seasons. Britton (1980) notes that it occurs in the Loliondo Highlands.

**\*GROSBEAK CANARY** *Serinus donaldsoni*

One seen in *Acacia tortilis* woodland near Ndotu, 19 Apr 1987, is further west than previously recorded (Britton 1980). It seems likely that the range is continuous between Ndotu and the Gregory Rift Valley to the E along Olduvai Gorge, as it is in the Yellow-necked Spurfowl *Francolinus leucoscepus*.

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